

Response to Franking Inquiry

In the Editor's Corner of the May Bulletin the question was posed as to why the Veterans Administration did not use penalty envelopes, like some other government agencies, instead of Perfins. George Fisher, Jr. (#1152) offers the following comment:

"It is my understanding that only those government agencies that were specifically permitted by Congress to use franked mail (penalty envelopes) did so. Other agencies pay postage. The present Government agency for which I work (the National Park Service, Department of the Interior) does not have the franking privilege, so we pay for our mailings, as does the whole Interior Department. Postage is paid to the Postal Service every year based on samples of mailings taken periodically through the year -- some years ago it was quarterly, and I suspect it still is, but I haven't checked on this activity for a while. Agencies which pay for their postage use envelopes that usually say something like 'Postage and Fees Paid,' followed by the name of the department, in the upper right corner of their envelopes. The eagle symbol is also usually imprinted alongside this indicia to provide a sufficiently solid inked area for automatic sorters to face government mail just like the machines face your mail bearing stamps.

"This printed indicia is a relatively new phenomenon insofar as the Department of the Interior is concerned. Until 1963, the National Park Service used ordinary stamps for its mail, which created untold accounting absurdities, like spending tens of dollars every month in clerks' salaries to keep track of a few cents' worth of stamps. And then the safeguarding--they had to be kept in strongboxes or safes so that nobody could filch a nickel stamp now and then. Which, of course, is what we wanted, but was the cost worth it? And just think -- any theft of U.S. Government property is a federal offense, so technically a Government employee was obliged to call in the F.B.I. if a five-cent stamp was discovered missing.

"Anyway, back in the sixties, the Department (or at least the Park Service part of it) got permission to use the 'Postage and Fees Paid' indicia -- not the 'Penalty for Private Use to Avoid Payment of Postage, \$300' one -- which meant what it said: the Department of the Interior pays in cash for its postal services.

"But it hasn't always been thus. I have a few old Interior Department envelopes from the period 1899 to 1919 with the oval-framed eagle indicia which bear the words 'OFFICIAL BUSINESS PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE \$300' within the design. Somebody with the time and inclination to research this subject could